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Readings Booklet

January 1998



English 33

Part B: Reading

Grade 12 Diploma Examination

Alberta
EDUCATION

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January 1998
English 33 Part B: Reading
Readings Booklet
Grade 12 Diploma Examination

Description

Part B: Reading contributes 50% of the total English 33 Diploma Examination mark.

There are 8 reading selections in the Readings Booklet and 70 questions in the Questions Booklet.

Time: 2 hours. You may take an additional 1/2 hour to complete the examination.

Instructions

- Be sure that you have an English 33 Readings Booklet **and** an English 33 Questions Booklet.
- You may **not** use a dictionary, thesaurus, or other reference materials.



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I. Questions 1 to 9 in your Questions Booklet are based on this short story.

THE PARTY

My Dad pressed a good crease into the trousers that went with his navyblue suit and he put a clean collar on his white shirt.¹ He was taking me to the party—four o'clock to six—because the invitation stated that the child must be accompanied by an unemployed father.

5 The day was damp and raw so, although I was too big, he held my hand to keep it warm. The other one I made into a fist and pulled up inside my sleeve. As we set out on the long walk, stores were already lit up, making the narrow city streets glow friendly in misty blurs. Inside butchers' shop windows there were
10 pigs' heads smiling with oranges in their mouths while outside fowl hung by the feet from high hooks ready for Christmas; ducks, pheasants, geese, turkeys, all plucked pimplly naked except for ruffs of their own special feathers left with the dead heads at the ends of their long stretched necks. Pastry shops smelled warm with hot crusty bread, custard tarts, clove-spicy mincemeat, and rich fruit cake. Sweet shops had coloured lights that turned jars of candies into caves of jewels. "I
15 could just eat a caramel. I dream about having a cream caramel in my mouth," I confided to my Dad.

"Imagine it," my Dad said. "Imagination tastes better than anything."

I believed him because he was my Dad.

20 We walked past factories whose tall fat-bellied chimneys spewed black smoke, and from whose grimy windows came sounds of machinery, and men's and women's chatter, and laughter.

"They're lucky in there to have jobs," my Dad told me.

Long before we reached the railway bridge the lamplighter was lighting the street lamps with his long pole. Boys and girls, as though called by magic, came
25 shouting to play in the golden islands of gaslight. With the mist and the lights, and the long walk, it seemed like night-time already when we dodged the traffic under the bridge at the main street crossroads while a train rumbled and rattled above us. Ahead we saw jolly signs with arrows pointing to the Town Hall, telling us where to enter for the children's party.

30 My Dad and I went inside, up a curving marble stairway, out of the cold, still holding hands because the building was so immensely grand, like the inside of castles in story books; and so importantly silent around the noise of the people. On the second floor my Dad told me to look down between the bulbous marble balusters to see the great crowd of children coming up the wide stairway holding

Continued

¹put a clean collar on his white shirt—at the time that this short story is set, dress shirts came with detachable collars to reduce the amount of laundering required

35 hands with their unemployed Dads. My Dad said, "It's a spectacle you'll want to remember."

I thought it was a spectacle when, at exactly four o'clock, we were let through heavy oaken doors into the biggest room I'd ever seen. Rows and rows of tables were covered in white, with thick white cups, saucers, and plates set out, and by every setting a red Christmas cracker.² At the far end of the room the stage had TWO Christmas trees on it, heavily garlanded with loops of glistening tinsel. Underneath and around the trees were mountains of gift parcels, fat squares and thin oblongs wrapped in plain colours; green, red, blue, yellow.

At first only the children were let in. I left my coat for my Dad to hold and followed where men and ladies with paper hats above their big smiles showed us where to go. "Fill up the next space," they called as we edged our way with bent knees between long benches and trestle tables. Before anyone told us we might, we started pulling the crackers, shouting, and getting the paper hats on our heads, red, yellow, green, or blue crowns. Little gifts came out of the crackers but mine got lost under the table. We had to wait until everybody had a seat and the tables were full before the party really started. A man dressed as Santa Claus made a space in front of the parcels on the stage and stood there shouting for us to be patient.

When all the children were in, our Dads were let in to stand round the sides of the hall to watch us. I waved to my Dad. He looked very small. All the Dads looked small. They didn't have paper hats. Most of them kept their workmans' caps on.

When the Dads were all in, we passed our cups to one end of the table to be filled with milky sweet tea from big jugs while, from the other end, white paper bags were passed down to us. "One bag per child," the men and women in the paper hats kept calling while our Dads watched. A beautiful pastry shop smell and flavour came out of my bag when I opened it. I closed it quickly to keep the glory in, but the boys on either side of me spread everything from their bags around their plates. "Everybody's got the same," the word went from child to child.

65 "Five things."

We were supposed to eat the five things while our Dads watched. Some children ate everything but quite a lot took only one bite out of each thing and left a mess on their plates. The men and women were happy to fill up the cups as many times as we liked. They smiled when we asked for more, so I had four cups of tea, but I ate only the bread bun because there were five—counting me—in our family.

Then it was time to go. The tables that came in last now went out first, the

Continued

²Christmas cracker—a small paper packet containing a paper hat and other trinkets, made so as to pop open when its ends are pulled

Dads going with the children. On the way out three Santa Clauses on each side, six altogether, gave out the gift boxes. Every age got a different colour. The
75 sevens got green oblongs. I was seven. I knew there was a board game inside by the way the box rattled.

The long walk home with my Dad was lovely, moonlit, starlit, lamplit and storelit. The roofs were wet and shining.

When we got home I gave my Mum the white bag I'd kept so tightly closed.
80 One by one she took out the currant bun, the cupcake with white icing on top, the chocolate cake with the brown icing, and the red lollipop, setting each one on the table, then shaking her head sadly at them.

"Four stale cakes! Yesterday's cakes and a penny lollipop! Could they spare them!" She bit on her lip to stop herself from crying.

85 My Mum didn't even catch a whiff of the pastry shop glory I'd saved for her.

I, however, kept very secure in the bag of my memories, the biggest party I was ever to see, with *two* Christmas trees and *six* Santas, where men and women with shining faces under paper hats had a lovely time doing something for the children of the poor.

Jan Truss
Contemporary Canadian writer

II. Questions 10 to 17 in your Questions Booklet are based on this poem.

LEARNING BY DOING

They're taking down a tree at the front door,
The power saw is snarling at some nerves,
Whining at others. Now and then it grunts,
And sawdust falls like snow or a drift of seeds.

- 5 Rotten, they tell us, at the fork, and one
Big wind would bring it down. So what they do
They do, as usual, to do us good.
Whatever cannot carry its own weight
Has got to go, and so on; you expect
10 To hear them talking next about survival
And the values of a free society.
For in the explanations people give
On these occasions there is generally some
Mean-spirited moral point, and everyone
15 Privately wonders if his neighbors plan
To saw him up before he falls on them.

- Maybe a hundred years in sun and shower
Dismantled in a morning and let down
Out of itself a finger at a time
20 And then an arm, and so down to the trunk,
Until there's nothing left to hold on to
Or snub the splintery holding rope around,
and where those big green divagations¹ were
So loftily with shadows interleaved
25 The absent-minded blue rains in on us.

Continued

¹divagations—wanderings, digressions

Now that they've got it sectioned on the ground
It looks as though somebody made a plain
Error in diagnosis, for the wood
Looks sweet and sound throughout. You couldn't know,
30 Of course, until you took it down. That's what
Experts are for, and these experts stand round
The giant pieces of tree as though expecting
An instruction booklet from the factory
Before they try to put it back together.
35 Anyhow, there it isn't, on the ground.
Next come the tractor and the crowbar crew
To extirpate² what's left and fill the grave.
Maybe tomorrow grass seed will be sown.
There's some mean-spirited moral point in that
40 As well: you learn to bury your mistakes,
Though for a while at dusk the darkening air
Will be with many shadows interleaved,
And pierced with a bewilderment of birds.

Howard Nemerov
Contemporary American writer

²extirpate—root out or uproot completely

III. Questions 18 to 27 in your Questions Booklet are based on this excerpt from a play.

from I HAD A JOB I LIKED. ONCE.

Two RCMP officers, FINESTAD and HEASMAN, disagree over how to handle the case of LES GRANT, a young man accused of committing a crime against the daughter of Mr. Tolbertson, a local crown attorney. Mr. Tolbertson is pressuring them to lay a charge immediately.

(HEASMAN *ushers LES GRANT into the room. . . . [LES's] hands involuntarily clench into fists at his sides. He looks away and furtively runs his forefinger back and forth under his twitching nose, a nervous habit he repeats whenever he feels strain. He is eighteen years old, dressed in faded jeans and a faded blue denim jacket. He is bare chested.*)

HEASMAN: All yours, Sergeant.

FINESTAD: Very good, Corporal.

(HEASMAN *exits. [LES] eyes FINESTAD uneasily. [LES] does his best to look casual, feigns¹ unconcern.*)

10 FINESTAD (Pointing): Take a seat.

(LES *sits. He nervously rubs his nose until he becomes aware of what he is doing, then he shoves his hand between his crossed legs, pinning it.*

FINESTAD settles himself carefully, disguising the discomfort his back is causing him, takes out a pack of cigarettes and offers them to the kid.)

15 FINESTAD: Smoke?

(LES *fishes out a cigarette and leans across the desk for a light. He tries to arrange himself in a surly, devil-may-care attitude in the chair.*)

FINESTAD: I've been trying to give those up for ten years. (*Beat*)² You should quit now before they become too much a habit.

20 (LES *doesn't answer. He blows on the end of the cigarette until it glows.*)

FINESTAD: Anything I can get you? Cup of coffee?

Continued

¹*feigns*—pretends

²*Beat*—a pause

LES (*Insolent*): Uh uh. Might keep me awake.

FINESTAD (*Showing no reaction*): Anything else? Tea? Water?

LES: Wouldn't mind a Coke.

25 (FINESTAD *leans back in his swivel chair and studies the boy. LES tries to meet his gaze, loses his nerve, looks around the room, rubs his nose, fidgets. FINESTAD picks up the receiver of the telephone on the desk and dials a single digit. Waits for an answer. LES watches apprehensively. The conversation that follows surprises and bewilders him.*)

30 **FINESTAD**: Corporal Heasman? Sergeant Finestad here. Yes. I've got a request from our guest. Could you step out and pick up a six pack of soft drinks? (*Pause*) Yes, I'm perfectly serious, Corporal. (*Pause*) I know it's late but the China Doll will still be open. Claire can take the desk. (*Pause*) Take the money out of petty cash, Tom, and I'll replace it before I go home. Yes. (*He*
35 *puts his hand over the mouthpiece of the receiver and addresses LES*) That's Coke, not Pepsi, right? (*Nonplussed, LES mechanically nods confirmation. FINESTAD back to HEASMAN*) Yes, Coke, please. All right, Tom. Thanks. (*He hangs up*) Corporal Heasman won't be long. I think we may as well get started. (*He consults his watch*) It's already Sunday. A man shouldn't have
40 to work Sundays. Should he?

LES: I work Sundays.

FINESTAD: In my line of work there's no escaping it. But I try to land the four-to-twelve or the graveyard shift on a Sunday. On them I can get to Mass.³ My wife likes to see me take regular confession⁴ and communion.⁵ (*Toys*
45 *with something on his desk, smiles to himself*)

LES (*Abruptly*): How long are you going to keep me here? I'm supposed to be at work by six this morning.

FINESTAD: Where do you work, Les?

LES: What's that got to do with anything?

50 **FINESTAD**: Just a question.

LES: Why should I answer "just a question"? When I don't know what it's got to do with anything?

FINESTAD: You like your work?

LES: Do you?

Continued

³Mass—celebration of the Eucharist, a Christian sacrament in which bread and wine are consecrated and consumed

⁴confession—formal declaration of one's sins, especially to a priest

⁵communion—participation in the Eucharist

55 **FINESTAD**: I used to like it.

(*Pause.*)

LES (*Despite himself*): I had a job I liked. Once.

FINESTAD: Once. (*Beat*) When was that?

LES: Summer of '63.

60 **FINESTAD**: Four years ago. You couldn't have been very old.

LES: Fourteen. . . .

FINESTAD (*Waiting a moment before proceeding*): And this job you liked, where was it?

LES (*Abrupt, sullen*): Golf course.

65 **FINESTAD** (*Flatly*): Golf course.

LES: Yeah, the summer they put in all the bunkers and sand traps.

(*Remembering*) The sand had to be just so, real fine, no rocks, or pebbles, so's when some big shot from head office was playing here, he wouldn't catch a rock blasting out of our traps and nick his . . . wedge or whatever.

70 (**FINESTAD** *laughs.*)

LES (*Encouraged*): Really. But they couldn't find the right sort of sand anywhere. So they had to make it. That's where I come in. You hire a kid under sixteen—you don't have to pay him minimum wage. It's the law. I come cheap. Sixty cents an hour. Least that's what I was *supposed* to get.

75 **FINESTAD** (*Drawing him out*): And you really *made* sand?

LES (*Forgetting himself, with pride*): Yeah, out in a gravel pit. First I had to pitch gravel against a coarse screen—to separate out the big stones. Then they had this shaker, like a big flour sifter. I fill it up with what's gone through the coarse screen and I shake it and shake it, shake it fine as powdered sugar. I shovel that on a wagon. When I get a wagonful—takes me two days—a
80 groundskeeper pulls it away with a tractor. Then I start over. Making sand.

FINESTAD (*Dubious*): And this job you liked?

LES (*With feeling*): Yeah, it was nice.

FINESTAD: Why?

85 **LES**: Huh?

FINESTAD: What was nice about it?

LES (*Slowly and carefully*): Well, I was alone out there, at the pit, see?

(**FINESTAD** *nods.*)

Continued

LES: I liked being alone. And there was all the fresh air and the sun and like that.
90 I got a great tan. Only summer I ever got a decent tan.

(FINESTAD *nods* and LES *seems to gain confidence from the gesture*.)

LES: I got so much sun that summer my hair started to bleach on top. (*He fingers it*) I had this Beach Boys album⁶ at home—I looked like Brian Wilson. I looked California.

95 FINESTAD: California?

LES: Surfer. I bought the ice-cream pants and the candy-stripe shirts to go with the hair, the tan. I had the desert boots. I wasn't the same guy come school in September. I had the total look. (*Pause*) But then—my hair grew back dark and I didn't have money for clothes (*Cynically indicating his appearance*) so I went back to being a geek.

100

FINESTAD: So no money—no total look.

LES: No money—no nothing.

FINESTAD: But on the other hand people say money isn't everything.

(LES *laughs bitterly*.)

105 FINESTAD (*Feigns surprise*): No?

LES: Can we talk about something else?

FINESTAD: You don't like talking about money?

LES: What good did talking about money ever do guys like me? I talked myself blue in the face to the big shots at the golf course. . . . Nobody listened.

110 FINESTAD: I'll listen.

LES (*Sarcastically*): Listening doesn't cost you nothing.

FINESTAD: And talking doesn't cost you anything either, Les. So tell me about the big shots at the golf course.

LES: . . . they said I get sixty cents an hour to throw gravel. That was the club manager said that. First payday I get my cheque—I'm short. "What's this?" I say. "Oh," he says, "the Recreation Board figures we oughtn't to pay by the hour, we ought to pay by the wagonload because you're off by yourself without a foreman and nobody knows how hard you work. So we'll pay you by the wagonload and then we know that we're getting value." So like I said,
115 it takes me two days to do a wagon so I ask, "How much a wagon?" And he says, "The board thought seven dollars a wagon. You want to work hard you should do pretty good." Work hard. Henderson is on that board and he pays
120

Continued

⁶album—record of several pieces of music

his kid a buck to cut his . . . lawn. How long does it take to do a lawn? Know why the big shots pay their little . . . suckers to cut the lawn? To teach them the meaning of a dollar. How come a dollar doesn't mean the same thing to me as it does Henderson's kid?

FINESTAD: So what did you do?

LES: What do you think? Took seven dollars a wagon. *(Pause)* What else, I ain't telling.

FINESTAD: Les's little secret.

(A moment of silence.)

FINESTAD: But you've got a different job now.

LES: Yeah. Swimming pool.

FINESTAD: Strikes me that the swimming pool would be a step up on the gravel pit. Sounds like the kind of summer job a young fellow would give his eye teeth for. Sounds glamorous.

LES: Right. . . .

FINESTAD: Sitting up there high on that lifeguard's chair with the best view of the bathing beauties, working on your tan. The high life with pay.

LES: Hey, what is it with you?

FINESTAD: Me?

LES: I'm maintenance. I'm pump room. Cold dripping pipes and sticky valves and chlorine to make your eyes water. I'm no . . . lifeguard. The lifeguard's chair belongs to the university boys. They got dibs on the high chair. Their daddies barbecue with the big shots. My daddy don't barbecue with nobody. He's no chum of theirs. *(Pause)* Me either, unless they need to bum a smoke.

Guy Vanderhaeghe
Contemporary Canadian writer

IV. Questions 28 to 36 in your Questions Booklet are based on this excerpt from a book.

from A DOCTOR IN THE WEST

“So you’re emigrating, Gibson. And to Canada?”

“That’s right.”

“Toronto?”

“No.”

5 “Montreal, then. An interesting city,” said my colleague reflectively. “The meeting place of two great cultures. A sophisticated sort of place, I should think.”

“We’re not going to Montreal.”

“Oh! Ah, Vancouver, of course! It’s a beautiful city, they tell me— mountains, the sea, and all that kind of thing.”

10 My inquisitor warmed his well-tailored bottom before the fireplace in Quern House, our medical club in Hull, Yorkshire.¹ He was a specialist, a few years older than myself, and dressed in fashionable tweeds, he adopted an air of complacent benevolence as he spoke. He was rocking backward and forward a little on his heels. It was a well-practised little mannerism of his, and was
15 calculated, I thought, to impress. He was slowly twirling the stem of his sherry glass between the forefinger and thumb of his right hand. His left hand was thrust into his jacket pocket.

“You’ll like Vancouver,” he beamed at me. “It’ll be a bit of a change, of course, from the North Sea to the Pacific, but . . .”

20 “We’re not going to Vancouver, either.”

I hadn’t meant to be curt or discourteous. I was preoccupied. I had resigned from Britain’s National Health Service a week or so before. My bridges were burnt behind me, and the enormity of the step I was about to make my little family
25 take weighed heavily upon me.

“Not Vancouver?”

Behind my colleague’s spectacles the benign gaze had been replaced by one of deep concern. He carefully placed his sherry glass on the mantelpiece before he spoke again. He stood quite still, was silent for a moment, then exclaimed,

“Good God! Where *are* you going?”

30 I had dropped in at our club for lunch. Several doctors met there regularly, exchanged the medical gossip of the day and had a sherry or perhaps a beer before a light meal.

It was early March, 1955. The late winter gale drove the rain in sheets along the pavement. A passer-by hurried along, umbrella held tight and low against the

Continued

¹Hull, Yorkshire—a location in England

35 force of the wind; a rivulet of rainwater snaked its way down the windowpane and cascaded from the sill to the pavement below. In the silence that followed his question, I could hear the rain splashing against the wall as it fell.

"We're going to a little cowtown in the foothills of the Rockies. Okotoks. It's about twenty-five miles south of Calgary in Alberta. They need a doctor and
40 don't have one."

"Calgary! Alberta! I say, old boy, you must be joking! You *can't* go there! It's just not your kind of thing. It won't work. There's nothing there—no culture, no character. *Nobody* to talk to. Nothing but oil wells and gum-chewing cowboy types."

45 We were the only members to attend for lunch that day and so we abandoned the dining table and sought the solace of the fireplace. We were ensconced in comfortable chairs, our luncheon plates balanced on our knees, when my acquaintance spoke again.

"What on earth made you do it, old boy? It's not money, I know. You've got
50 a very good practice. You've just bought that house out at West Ella, a beautiful spot too, so I'm told. So what in the name of heaven makes a man like you pull up stakes and take his wife and daughter to some God-forsaken spot on the Canadian prairies? What d'you call it again?"

"Okotoks. The population is six hundred and seventy if you want to know,
55 with scattered ranches and farms in the surrounding countryside."

"Okotoks? It sounds like hell to me. Have you ever been to Western Canada?"

"No. I've been to Eastern Canada but never further west than Ontario."

"How far's Ontario from your precious Okotoks?"

60 "About two thousand miles."

"My God. Why don't you go to Turkey? It isn't any further away from civilization, if it's a change of scenery you're looking for!"

"I don't need any change of scenery," I replied. "I love it here, and until four or five years ago, I loved my work too. But I'm not going to spend the rest of my
65 life signing endless sick certificates and doing slaphappy, hurried medicine."

"What does Janet say to all this?"

"A couple of months ago, she said she'd be damned if she'd emigrate. But she's as frustrated as I am, and for a girl who used to speak at meetings in favor of a Health Service, that should say something!"

70 "What about Catriona?"

"Our little one is very secure. She's seen a bit of the States and Canada. It's a great adventure for her. My one promise is that she'll have her own pony, and not just one hired from the riding school!"

Continued

My companion turned his attention to his lunch for a few minutes, but I knew
75 he was watching me.

“Tell me,” he said, “what brought it to a head? And how did you choose this
cowntown of yours?”

“For two years now, I’ve quietly been studying law. I’m nearly half way to
being a lawyer and there have been many times when I’ve thought of getting out
80 of medicine altogether. But we made our decision a few months ago. One night
I’d been called out by a midwife who was having problems with one of her cases.
I was out for an hour or two. We ended up with a forceps delivery and a few
problems. When I got home, it was early morning and my brain was just racing,
so I set the card table up by the fire—it was still smoldering—and I worked away
85 at the Law of Torts² and Contracts. I don’t know how long I’d been there when I
realized I wasn’t alone. I turned round and there was Janet, curled up in a chair
watching me. It was almost dawn.”

“Darling,” she said, “you’ll get that law degree—but you’ll never be anything
but a doctor. We’re going to emigrate.”

90 “How on earth did you choose Okotoks?”

I smiled. “We were in the States a year ago, visiting an old buddy of mine in
the U.S. Army. A wonderful old surgeon offered me a job in Washington, D.C.,
but I told him that if I emigrated I’d go where the Union Jack³ still flies.”

“That was a bit touchy with an American, wasn’t it?”

95 “Not at all. He’d worked as a medical missionary all over the world, and he
told me there was still a frontier spirit in Western Canada. He said there were
little towns in the foothills of the Rockies that needed doctors. When we
contacted the Canadian Immigration people, Janet and I had stipulated that we
wanted to go where we were needed, not to a large city. We studied maps for
100 hours and talked for days. The immigration people had given us the names of
three towns in Alberta that needed doctors. One place seemed much the same as
another.”

Finally Janet said, “Let’s make it Okotoks. It’s got two OKs in it, so it’s OK
with me.”

105 After lunch my colleague, doubtfully, wished me good luck.

Morris Gibson (1916–1990)

Alberta doctor and writer

²Torts—area of law dealing with breaches of duty (other than under contract) leading to liability for damages

³Union Jack—the flag of the United Kingdom. At the time in which this memoir is set, the Union Jack was also a part of the Red Ensign, the flag of Canada

V. Questions 37 to 45 in your Questions Booklet are based on this excerpt from an article.

from WOMAN WITH WANDERLUST

... I'm now waiting out a dust storm beside a grain elevator, eyeing each passing freight train as my ticket east. ... I've been a hobo for the past six years, wandering about North America with everything I own on my back. ...

... to be a hobo for years at a time means poverty as well as freedom.

10 And when I settle down for a hot coffee after finding enough forgotten coins in pay telephones, or during a night spent in a Salvation Army clothes bin, burrowed among the cast-offs of those who sleep in houses, or when the cold finally gets to me, forcing me to find work and housing for three or four months in the harshest part of the winter, I flip
20 through the pages of my weather-beaten journals, looking back at the vignettes that create the strange collage of my vagabonding years: ...

... Spent the night camped out with some drifters in a quarry near Prince Rupert. We lit a campfire, cooked seafood chowder over the flames, played guitar and sang folk
30 songs until 3 a.m. under the shining northern lights. Woke this morning to a doe and her spotted fawns grazing among us. Two elderly

couples were coming down the trail. I held up my hand to silently call their attention to the deer. We all watched for a time, the old tourists from a motor home, the young drifters who thumb and cycle from
40 town to town. It was a wonderful blend of seasonings. ...

I'm in a coffee shop in Squamish reading a Margaret Atwood novel. Every 15 minutes or so I look up. The world is passing through. The faces change around me but I stay moulded to my book, growing into its pages like fungus, unable to meet yet another stranger's eyes.

50 It's finally dark. Soon I'll return to my sleep spot in the shrubbery at the local hospital. I'll have to move my sleeping bag over two feet. Last night I inadvertently slept on a dead bird. This morning I woke early to the automatic sprinklers. I went into the hospital and lounged in the waiting room with a copy of *National Geographic*. An old
60 woman told me about her husband who'd had a stroke the night before, about her daughter in university, her stillborn son. Afterwards she asked, "So what's your story, if it's not too personal?" I said, "I just slept in the shrubbery out front and came in to

Continued

read the magazines.” Sudden
silence. Interesting how she felt
comfortable sharing her life with me
70 until then. Perhaps my delivery
could use some work. . .

I’ve spent my last few loonies to
take this ferry to Vancouver Island.
It’s late fall and I must get a job and
a home for the winter. I feel myself
becoming superstitious, grasping on
to anything that can give me a
glimpse of hope. Before I
clambered aboard this vessel I said
80 to myself, “If I see a whale during
the ferry ride it will mean I’ll have
work and shelter soon.” But the
ride is almost over and I’ve seen no
whale. A seal would do now. I
shoulder my pack and exit the ferry.
There’s a seagull. Yes, all will be
fine. . .

Slept on a pee-stained mattress in
a barn on Gabriola Island last night
90 but was kicked out this morning by
an ignorant man who wore his brand
of beer across his T-shirt like a
social cause. I’m tired of hiding.
I’m tired of waiting for cars to go by
to mask the sound of me unzipping
my sleeping bag.

Sometimes I feel as though I’m
little more than a target.
Occasionally I wear a fake
100 moustache to avoid harassment
when I’m looking for a place to

sleep. I choose to travel alone and I
know I must be cautious. I wear
baggy clothing. I lead people to
believe that I’m expected some-
where and that I’ll be missed if I
don’t show. I’ve become adept at
tactfully heading off sexual
confrontations.

110 Sometimes I’m followed, stalked
like prey, simply because I’m a
woman travelling alone. Some men
say, “You’re just asking for it,
sweetie,” as though it’s me who
needs to change. But more often the
men and women I meet are
trustworthy and incredibly giving. . .

There’s a man in North Bay that
I’ve been watching. He lives in the
120 streets, carries all he owns in a
grocery bag, wears a red polka dot
hat. I want to speak with him but,
although I too am homeless, I share
the same fear as middle-class
people, that he may be crazy or
violent or ask for money. Does he
crave anything anymore or does he
just accept that a warm coffee every
fortnight¹ is all he may ever have?

130 Some statues were vandalized in
town last week. The city now wants
to guard them 24 hours a day.
Objects get more protection and
concern than the homeless. The
man in the polka-dot hat sleeps in
the front doorway of the bus station
and if he died no one would notice,
except me, maybe. Like me, he

Continued

¹fortnight—two weeks

spends a lot of time in the library on
140 these wintery days. I saw the book
he was looking at. It had pictures of
tall ships. A dream, perhaps?
Human and wanting, just like me,
just like everyone. . .

Sundays in Nanaimo are for
couples and kite flyers in the park.
The homeless take to the barren
downtown streets. We trade venues
with the professionals but neither
150 side gets a true taste of the other's
existence. Only a hint of its
fragrance or stench.

I saw a bum patting a stray dog
today. I said, "She's beautiful, isn't
she?" He said, "You better believe
it." A simple exchange but I've
come to know how much that
means. The folks here won't look
me in the face. They've seen me
160 collecting beer cans and respond
coolly to my good mornings.
They'd ignore me completely if they
could be positive I'm riffraff. When
I ask for directions they don't listen.
They just say, "No spare change,"
and hustle away. . . .

I'm stowing away on an Alaskan
ferry for two days. An old man has
befriended me. He used to ride the
170 rails and sleep on the roadsides,
absorbing the lingering heat from
the pavement at night. He asks me
if I honestly enjoy being a hobo.

How do I even begin to answer?

"Does an alcoholic enjoy
drinking?" I wonder.

When I'm leaning against the
180 cairn² at the summit of the Chilkoot
Trail, taking a break before my
descent into the rugged, treeless
Yukon, when I'm hiking the West
Coast Trail munching sun-warmed
huckleberries, hearing the grey
whales spout hollow shouts into the
fog, when I'm standing on a
roadside before hundreds of layers
of sedimentary rock cut open to
expose time, when I awake to a
shining day on Prince Edward
190 Island, surrounded by field grass
tinged with sunrise it seems the
perfect life.

The characters I meet are also why
I travel. A hunter picked me up, his
bloodhounds howling in the back of
the truck. "I've had three wives and
two dogs," he said. "And I've still
got the two dogs." A woman with
terminal cancer gave me a lift in
200 New York. She had just left her
abusive husband, bought a pair of
hiking boots and planned to spend
her last years climbing mountains.
. . . These people all weave them-
selves into my life, becoming part of
how I think and grow. . .

"God, I envy you," my last ride
enthused. "I wish I'd have done
what you're doing when I was
210 young. You're such a free spirit." I

Continued

²cairn—pyramid of rough stones as a memorial

replied politely, saying something noncommittal and vaguely positive. Now I'm crashing in the woods near Whistler, B.C., watching the choppers fly low overhead in grid patterns, searching for a woman who went missing last week nearby. I don't feel so free. My ride had seemed intent on figuring me out.

220 She asked, "What would it take to make you stable?"

"A goldfish and a potted plant," I said.

"No, seriously," she insisted.

"Would a man do it? The right man?"

"No."

"A woman, then?" (Aha! she said in her mind.)

230 "No, not a woman either."

"What then?" she persisted.

"A goat," I answered. (There's something for her to chew on.) "A homestead in the wilderness, the responsibility of upkeep, natural deadlines. Chop the wood before dark, pick the tomatoes before frost, patch the roof before rain. . ."

240 I don't know why I wander. In a way I feel as though I'm growing into what I always was. I haven't turned away from what comes naturally to me and there's some peace of mind that comes with that knowledge. I don't wrestle with "If I had it to do over again I'd be a

250 lawyer." I don't feel like a fake and I haven't wasted my time. I've grown fast and hard. But it's time to stop now. It's time to find a home and from there I'll learn what wandering hasn't taught me: how to know someone for more than a day, how to be known, how to occupy space, how to maintain a friendship.

I long for a cabin by a northern lake and I fantasize about the colour of light in my kitchen in the early morning. I want a pottery teapot and shelves full of books. My feet want to know there will always be a wood stove to snuggle against on frosty fall days. My hands want to know there will always be a tall mug of coffee to hold like an old and trusted friend who has no more surprises.

270 But for today I'm a drifter. And I suspect I'll still be a drifter tomorrow because this morning I awoke in a field to a clear day knowing that I had inhaled an entire night, that the black sky was in my lungs and throat. I crawled out of my sleeping bag to take what's mine: warmth, breakfast, a drink from my water bottle, a greeting from a passing stranger, a god-awful country tune I heard yesterday and couldn't stop whistling. And in this hobo life I live that's more than enough. In fact, that's damn near perfect.

Jay Rainey
Contemporary Canadian writer

- VI. Robin is preparing a brief oral report entitled “A Hobo’s Life.” Read the first draft of Robin’s report, carefully noting her revisions, and answer questions 46 to 52 in your Questions Booklet.

A HOBO’S LIFE

- Paragraph** When we were given this assignment about alternate “lifestyles,” I immediately
- 1 thought of the *Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous*, but then I thought that was too obvious. I decided to try to find out about an unusual ^{lifestyle, one that} ~~lifestyle. Like something~~ most people wouldn’t necessarily see as an attractive way to live. Among the research materials that our librarian provided, I found the article “Woman with Wanderlust.” I first thought that the writer, Jay Rainey, might be a travel agent, but I soon found out that I was wrong. She was a hobo!
- Paragraph** What kind of person does the word “hobo” suggest to you? Does it bring to mind
- 2 someone who is lazy and careless? I have to admit that until I read Jay Rainey’s article, I would of laughed at the idea of anyone *choosing* to be a hobo. But Ms. Rainey’s sincerity changed my mind.
- Paragraph** Jay Rainey travelled around North America for six years with everything she
- 3 owned on her back. While travelling, she learned a lot about herself and others. She learned that she could survive some very rough living, like sleeping in shrubbery in Squamish or in a barn on Gabriola Island. She found out that experiences such as seeing a doe with her fawns, ^{eating} ~~to eat~~ wild berries along a trail, or catching a ride with a man who prefers the company of dogs to the company of wives ^{could} ~~can~~ all help her to think, to grow, and to be truly happy.

Continued

She also mentioned some of the disadvantages of being a hobo. She recognized the possible dangers to women travelling alone. She learned that ^{some} communities place more value on statues than on people.
^

Paragraph We have all been told that we have to make preparations for the life that we choose. After reading about the life of the hobo, I came up with some thoughts about this particular kind of life. First, a person has to be able to "rough it."

People who are too ~~much~~ dependent on soft beds, regular meals, and fancy clothes should forget about the life of the footloose and fancy-free. Jay Rainey

made it as a hobo because she accepted many discomforts and potential dangers. ^{Second, it is really important to have a sense of adventure} Jay Rainey enjoyed studying people, exploring Canada, and writing ^{and an interest in other people.} about her experiences in her journal.

Paragraph Finally, in this assignment we were to say whether or not we would recommend the type of life that we researched. Although being a hobo means freedom to be yourself and to learn about people and places, I personally wouldn't recommend it as a way of life. I might daydream about being free to wander, but I know that I will have to find a safer, more practical "lifestyle."

VII. Questions 53 to 58 in your Questions Booklet are based on this poem.

POSTCARD FROM CIVILIZATION

- We've rented a modern house on a dead-end street
Almost like all the others on the street.
The contract tells us, Keep the garden neat,
And so we try to keep the garden neat.
- 5 I haven't the touch that makes a green thing grow,
But I can follow a mower, and I mow.
- Piston-like, my Suffolk Colt and I
Range up and down the garden, up and down,
While over hedges, unknown neighbors ply
- 10 Like pistons in their gardens, up and down.
Each of us slides within his cylinder;
The engine runs, the City is secure.
- E pluribus unum*: out of many, one;
Yet independence makes the engine run,
- 15 And launched like astronauts we whirl around
These ordered orbits over the common ground,
Achieving our personal visions, high and alone—
O, green and sweet is the smell of the soul new-mown.

Charles W. Pratt
Contemporary American poet

VIII. Questions 59 to 70 in your Questions Booklet are based on this excerpt from a short story.

from AN UNDERGROUND EPISODE

Three figures leaned against the slanting rain—Alamo Laska, Nick Christopher, and the boy who had run away from home. They rested on their long-handled shovels and, as they gazed into the crater which by their brawn they had hollowed into the earth, the blue clay oozed back again, slowly devouring the
5 fruits of their toil.

Laska, the nomad, thought of the wild geese winging southward to warm bayous. Nick's heart, under the bone and muscle of his great chest, swelled with thoughts of his wife and child who lived in a foreign city across an ocean. The boy felt the sting of rain against his cheeks and dreamed of his mother, who
10 seemed lovely and far away. . . .

A long gray mound stretched away from the crater opposite the machine. Buried thirty feet below the mound was the new-laid sewer pipe. From the bottom of the pit at the machine, the pipe ran a hundred yards horizontally under the surface, opening in a manhole. The hundred yards of new-laid pipe was the
15 reason for the three men digging in the rain. They had dug eleven hours trying to uncover the open end of the pipe in order to seal it against the mud. . . . The bank had caved, and the mud had crawled into the mouth of the pipe, obstructing it. . . .

After a long time of waiting, a yellow light flamed into being in the shanty, and they heard the muffled scraping of boots on the board floor. The shanty door
20 opened. A rectangle of light stood out sharply.

Swart¹ figures crossed and recrossed the lighted area, pouring out into the storm.

"Ho!" called Laska.

"Ho!" came the answer, galloping to them in the wind.

25 They heard the rasping of caked mud on dungarees,² the clank of shovels, the voice of Stender, the foreman. Lanterns swung like yellow pendulums. Long-legged shadows reached and receded.

The diggers gathered about the rim of the pit, staring. Stender's face showed in the lantern light. His lips were wrinkled, as if constantly prepared for
30 blasphemy. He was a tall, cursing conqueror. Orders shot from his throat, and noisily the men descended into the pit and began to dig. They drew huge, gasping breaths like mired³ beasts fighting for life.

The boy watched, his eyes bulging in the dark. Hitherto he had thought very

Continued

¹Swart—dark

²dungarees—overalls

³mired—stuck in mud

briefly of sewers, regarding them as unlovely things. But Laska and Nick and
35 Stender gave them splendor and importance. The deep-trench men were
admirable monsters. They knew the clay, the feel and pattern of it, for it had long
been heavy in their minds and muscles. They were big in three dimensions and
their eyes were black and barbarous. When they ate, it was with rough and tumble
40 lustily with a view to satiation. They worked stupendously. They were diggers in
clay, transformed by lantern light into a race of giants.

Through the rain came Stender, his black slicker crackling. "They're down,"
he said. "Angelo just struck the pipe."

Laska grunted.

45 Stender blew his nose with his fingers, walked away, and climbed down into
the hole. They lost sight of him as he dropped over the rim. The sound of digging
had ceased and two or three men on the surface rested on their shovels, the light
from below gleaming on their flat faces. Laska and the boy knew that Stender
was examining the pipe. They heard him swearing at what he had found.

50 After a moment he clambered up over the rim and held up a lantern. His
cuddy,⁴ gripped firmly between his teeth, was upside down to keep out the wet.

"Someone's got to go through the pipe," he said, raising his voice. "There's
fifty bucks⁵ for the man that'll go through the pipe into the manhole with a line
tied to his foot. Fifty bucks!"

55 There was a moment of quiet. The men thought of the fifty dollars, and
furtively measured themselves against the deed at hand. It seemed to the boy that
he was the only one who feared the task. He did not think of the fifty dollars, but
thought only of the fear. Three hundred feet through a rathole, eighteen inches in
diameter. Three hundred feet of muck, of wet black dark, and no turning back.

60 But, if he did not volunteer, they would know that he was afraid. The boy stepped
from behind Laska and said uncertainly: "I'll go, Stender," and wished he might
snatch back the words; for, looking about him, he saw that not a man among those
present could have wedged his shoulders into the mouth of an eighteen-inch pipe.
He was the only volunteer. They had known he would be the only one.

65 Stender came striding over, holding the lantern above his head. He peered
into the boy's face. "Take off your clothes," he said.

"Take off my clothes?"

"That's what I said."

"You might get a buckle caught in a joint," said Laska. "See?"

70 The boy saw only that he had been trapped very cunningly. At home he
could have been openly fearful, for at home everything about him was known.

Continued

⁴cuddy—a short pipe used for smoking tobacco

⁵fifty bucks—at the time in which this story is set, fifty dollars was approximately one month's salary

There, quite simply, he could have said: "I won't do it. I'm frightened. I'll be killed." But here the diggers in clay were lancing him with looks. And Laska was bringing a ball of line, one end of which would be fastened to his ankle.

75 "Just go in a sweater," said Laska. "A sweater and boots over your woolens. We'll be waiting for you at the manhole."

He wanted so desperately to dive off into the night that he felt his legs bracing for a spring, and a tight feeling in his throat. Then, mechanically, he began to take off his clothes. Nick had gone clumping off to the shanty and
80 shortly he returned with a pair of hip boots. "Here, kid. I get 'em warm for you inna shanty."

He thrust his feet into the boots, and Laska knelt and tied the heavy line to his ankle. "Too tight?"

"No. It's all right, I guess."

85 "Well—come on."

They walked past Stender, who was pacing up and down among the men. They slid down into the crater, deepened now by the diggers. They stood beside the partly covered mouth of the pipe. They were thirty feet below the surface of the ground.

90 Laska reached down and tugged at the knot he had tied in the line, then he peered into the mouth of the tube. He peered cautiously, as if he thought it might be inhabited. The boy's glance wandered up the wet sides of the pit. Over the rim a circle of bland yellow faces peered at him. Sleet tinkled against lanterns, splattered down and stung his flesh.

95 "Go ahead in," said Laska.

The boy didn't move.

"Just keep thinking of the manhole, where you'll come out," said Laska.

The boy's throat constricted. . . . He got down on his belly in the slush-ice and mud. It penetrated slowly to his skin and spread over him. He put his head
100 inside the mouth of the pipe, drew back in horror. Some gibbering words flew from his lips. . . . Laska's voice was already shop-worn with distance. "You can make it! Go ahead."

He lay on his left side, and, reaching out with his left arm, caught a joint and drew himself in. The mud oozed up around him, welling up against the left side
105 of his face. He pressed his right cheek up against the ceiling of the pipe to keep the muck from covering his mouth and nose. Laska's voice was far and muffled. Laska was in another world—a sane world of night, of storm, and the yellow glow of lanterns.

"Are you makin' it all right, kid?"

110 The boy cried out, his ears ringing with his cry. It re-echoed from the sides of the pipe. The sides hemmed him in, pinned him, closed him in on every side with

Continued

their paralyzing circumference.

There is no darkness like the darkness of underground that miners know. It borrows something from night, from tombs, from places used by bats. Such fluid
115 black can terrify a flame, and suffocate and drench a mind with madness. There is a fierce desire to struggle, to beat one's hands against the prison. The boy longed to lift his pitiful human strength against the walls. He longed to claw at his eyes in the mad certainty that more than darkness curtained them.

He had moved but a few feet on his journey when panic swept him. Ahead of
120 him the mud had built into a solid wave. Putting forth his left hand, he felt a scant two inches between the wave's crest and the ceiling of the pipe. There was nothing to do but go back. If he moved ahead, it meant death by suffocation. He tried to back away, but caught his toe in a joint of the pipe. He was entombed! In an hour he would be a body. The cold and dampness would kill him before they
125 could dig down to him. Nick and Laska would pull him from the muck, and Laska would say: "Huh, his clock's stopped."

He thrashed with delirious strength against his prison. He felt the skin tearing from the backs of his hands as he flailed the rough walls. And some gods must have snickered, for above the walls of the pipe were thirty feet of unyielding clay,
130 eight thousand miles of earth below. A strength, a weight, a night, each a thousand times his most revolting dream, leaned upon the boy, depressing, crushing, stamping him out. The ground gave no cry of battle. It did no bleeding, suffered no pain, uttered no groans. It flattened him silently. It swallowed him in its foul despotism.⁶ It dropped its merciless weight upon his mind. . . .

135 In the midst of his frenzy, when he had beaten his face against the wall until it bled, he heard a ringing voice he knew was real, springing from human sympathy. It was Laska calling: "Are you all right, kid?"

In that instant the boy loved Laska as he loved his life. Laska's voice sheered the weight from him, scattered the darkness, brought him new balance and a hope
140 to live.

"Fine!" he answered in a cracking yell. He yelled again, loving the sound of his voice and thinking how foolish yelling was in such a place.

With his left hand he groped ahead and found that the wave of mud had settled, levelled off by its own weight. He drew his body together, pressing it
145 against the pipe. He straightened, moved ahead six inches. His fingers found a loop of oakum⁷ dangling from a joint, and he pulled himself on, his left arm forward, his right arm behind his hip, like a swimmer's.

He had vanquished panic, and he looked ahead to victory. Each joint brought him twenty inches nearer his goal. Each twenty inches was a plateau which

Continued

⁶despotism—absolute power or authority

⁷oakum—caulking made from short fibers salvaged from used rope

150 enabled him to envision another plateau—the next joint. The joints were like small deceitful rests upon a march.

He had been more than an hour on the way. He did not know how far he had gone, a third, perhaps, even a half of the distance. He forgot the present, forgot fear, wet, cold, blackness; he lost himself in dreaming of the world of men outside
155 the prison. It was as if he were a small superb island in hell.

He did not know how long he had been counting the joints, but he found himself whispering good numbers: “fifty-one, fifty-two, fifty-three. . . .” Each joint, when he thought of it, appeared to take up a vast time of squirming in the muck, and the line dragged heavily behind his foot.

160 Suddenly, staring into the darkness so that it seemed to bring a pain to his eyes, he saw a pallid ray. He closed his eyes, opened them, and looked again. The ray was real, and he uttered a whimper of relief. He knew that the ray must come from Stender’s lantern. He pictured Stender and a group of the diggers huddled in the manhole, waiting for him, and he thought of them worshipfully.

165 “Seventy-six, seventy-seven, seventy-eight. . . .”

The ray grew slowly, like a worthwhile thing. It took an oval shape, and the oval grew fat, like an egg, then round. It was a straight line to the manhole and the mud had thinned.

Through the pipe, into the boy’s ears, a voice rumbled like half-hearted
170 thunder. It was Stender’s voice: “How you makin’ it?”

“Oh, just fine!” His cry came pricking back into his ears like a shower of needles. . . .

The round yellow disc before him gave him his only sense of living. It was a sunlit landfall, luring him on. He would close his eyes and count five joints, then
175 open them quickly, cheering himself at the perceptible stages of progress.

Then, abruptly, it seemed, he was close to the manhole. He could hear men moving. He could see the outline of Stender’s head as Stender peered into the mouth of the pipe. Men kneeled, pushing each other’s heads to one side in order to watch him squirm toward them. They began to talk excitedly. . . . Stender and
180 Laska reached in. They got their hands upon him. They hauled him to them, as if he were something they wanted to inspect scientifically. He felt as if they thought he was a rarity, a thing of great oddness. The light dazzled him. . . . He heard Stender’s voice: “Well, he made it all right. What do you know?”

“Here, kid,” said Laska, holding the bottle to his mouth. “Drink all this that
185 you can hold.”

He could not stand up. He believed calmly that his flesh and bones were constructed of putty. He could hear no vestige of the song of victory he had

Continued

dreamed of hearing. He looked stupidly at his hands, which bled painlessly. He could not feel his arms and legs at all. He was a vast sensation of lantern light and the steam of human beings breathing in a damp place.

Faces peered at him. The faces were curious, and surprised. He felt a clouded, uncomprehending resentment against them. Stender held him up on one side, Laska on the other. They looked at each other across him. Suddenly Laska stooped and gathered him effortlessly in his arms.

“You’ll get covered with mud,” mumbled the boy.

“Damn if he didn’t make it all right,” said Stender. “Save us tearing out the pipe.”

The boy’s wet head fell against Laska’s chest. He felt the rise and fall of Laska’s muscles, and knew that Laska was climbing with him up the iron steps inside the manhole. . . . He buried his head deeper into Laska. Laska’s body became a mountain of warmth. He felt a heavy, sighing peace, like a soldier who has been comfortably wounded and knows that war for him is over.

Edmund Ware (1900–1967)

American writer

Credits

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